

# A SNAPSHOT OF CHURCH HISTORY AND MOSAIC LAW

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Passover (Lev. 23:4-8f.; Mt. 26:26f.) and the 7th day Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Lk. 4:16) aren't observed by most Christians today, but in the days of the Apostles they were (Acts 15:21; 21:20-24; 1st Cor. 5:6-8), which reveals that they kept Mosaic Law. The Church teaches that the Law was nullified at the death of Jesus, but Church History records that for the first 90 years *after* the resurrection, *all* Christians kept Passover and the 7th day Sabbath, and walked out their faith in Christ through all the rules of Moses *that applied to them*.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, in his Christian classic, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), writes that Eusebius, a Roman Catholic bishop-historian (ca. AD 260-340), wrote of the Passover-Easter controversy flaring up in the 2nd century:<sup>1</sup>

“There were...two protagonists...Bishop Victor of Rome (AD 189-199), who championed... Easter-Sunday...and threatened to excommunicate the...Christian communities of the province of Asia, which refused to follow his instruction<sup>2</sup>...On the other side, Polycrates, the Bishop of Ephesus and representative of the Asian churches, strongly advocated the traditional (biblical) Passover date of Nisan 14, commonly called ‘Quartodeciman Passover.’”<sup>3</sup> “Polycrates, claiming to possess *the genuine apostolic tradition transmitted to him by the Apostles Philip and John*, refused to be frightened into submission by the threats of Victor of Rome.”<sup>4</sup>

Victor, the Bishop of Rome (189-199 AD), whose office would become that of the Pope, wanted all Christians to keep Easter instead of Passover, but Polycrates (130-196 AD), Bishop of Ephesus and representative of all the churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey, where Paul, Barnabas and Silas did much of their evangelizing, and where John's seven churches of Revelation are; Rev. 2:1-3:22), refused to be frightened into submission by the threats of excommunication by Victor. Polycrates not only knew “*the genuine apostolic tradition transmitted to him by the Apostles Philip and John*,”<sup>5</sup> but also that “*the Apostles Philip and John had taught the Asian churches to celebrate the Passover.*”<sup>6</sup> Alexander Roberts, translating from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, states,

“the traditions of St. John were yet fresh in men's minds at the date of his (Polycrates') birth (130 AD). He had doubtless known Polycarp and Irenaeus...*It is surely noteworthy that nobody doubted that it (the Passover) was kept by a Christian and Apostolic ordinance.*”<sup>7</sup>

Eusebius also records that Polycrates wrote a letter to Victor in Rome, speaking of what all the bishops of Asia, as well as he, thought about Passover, and their unwillingness to celebrate Easter (or ‘Resurrection Sunday’ as some Christians, wanting to steer clear of pagan *Easter*, call it today):

“We observe the exact day; *neither adding nor taking away*” (from Scripture). “For in Asia ...great lights have fallen asleep...among these are Philip, one of the twelve Apostles, who fell asleep in Hierapolis...and...John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord...he fell asleep at Ephesus. And Polycarp in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr...All these observed *the 14th day of the Passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith*. And I also, Polycrates...who have lived 65 years in the Lord...*and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words*”

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<sup>1</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath To Sunday* (Rome, Italy: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), p. 118, note 101. Eusebius' account of the Easter controversy is found in *HE* 5, 23-24. Read *From Sabbath to Sunday* at <http://SeedofAbraham.net/From-Sabbath-to-Sunday.pdf>. This is the definitive work on the issue of Sabbath vs. Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* *Quarto-deciman* is Latin and means 14. It was the 14th day of the first Hebrew month, 14 *Aviv* (called *Nisan* today) that the Passover lamb was sacrificed on (Ex. 12:1-10; Lev. 23:5), and was eaten that night (15 *Aviv*).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 1885.

(of Victor). “For those greater than I have said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than man!’” (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29) “I could mention the bishops who were present...whose names... *would constitute a great multitude.*” They “*gave their consent to the letter*, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, *but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus.*”<sup>8</sup>

Church History records that the conflict was about Catholicism having veered off from Scripture (in 120 AD under Bishop Sixtus of Rome) and stripping Christians of their biblical heritage (Mosaic Law, as specifically realized here in Passover), and the replacing of it with the pagan day of Easter Sunday<sup>9</sup> As for Mosaic Law being valid for Christians *after* the resurrection, Church History also records that the Nazarenes kept Mosaic Law for hundreds of years. They are attested to as late as 400 AD by Jerome and are “the direct descendants of the Christian community of Jerusalem.”<sup>10</sup> Noted French scholar Marcel Simon characterized them as possessing “*the original practice of...Christianity.*”<sup>11</sup> He wrote they were “characterized...*by their tenacious attachment to Jewish observances* ...They...represent...*the...direct descendants* of the primitive” (Apostolic) “community.”<sup>12</sup> The Nazarenes kept the Sabbath, all the Feasts of Israel and all the rules of Mosaic Law that applied to them hundreds of years after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (70 AD). Eusebius writes of the leadership in the Church of Jerusalem, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome, a second time, in 135 AD, saying it consisted,

“of converted Hebrews and was administered by 15 bishops *from the circumcision*” (Jewish Christians)<sup>13</sup> “and they were “*zealous to insist on the **literal observance of the Law.***”<sup>14</sup> (Cf. Acts 21:20-24, where the Apostle Paul takes a *Nazarite Vow*, seen in the shaving of the head, ‘a very Mosaic Law’ thing to do, especially as it called for animal sacrifice; see Num. 6:14. This also confirms that Mosaic Law was God’s Christian lifestyle until Sixtus altered it; cf. Dan. 7:25.)

Epiphanius (315-403), another Roman Catholic bishop-historian, offers an insightful description of the Mosaic Law keeping Nazarenes in his time, more than 300 years *after* the resurrection. He wrote that the Nazarenes,

“*do not differ* in any essential thing from them (i.e. non-believing Jews), *since they practice the custom and doctrines prescribed by the Jewish Law*, except that they believe in Christ. They believe in the resurrection of the dead and that the universe was created by God. They preach that God is one and that Jesus Christ is his Son. They are very learned in the Hebrew language. They read the Law...*They fulfill till now Jewish rites as the...Sabbath and others.*”<sup>15</sup>

Both Gentile Christians (Polycrates and all Turkey, etc.), and Jewish Christians (the Nazarenes) walked out their faith in Jesus through all the laws of Moses that applied to them. Both Scripture<sup>16</sup> and Church History confirm this. Mosaic Law is an essential part of biblical Christianity because it reveals the full extent of what is sin, in God’s eyes (Rom. 3:20b). It’s also God’s definition of love (see Mt. 22:35-40; every rule of Moses explains *how* to love God and Man). Without Mosaic Law a Christian is not ‘fully equipped’ (2nd Tim. 3:10-17; cf. Dt. 4:6-8).

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<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, Book V, Chapter 24.

<sup>9</sup> See The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop at <http://seedofabraham.net/The-Two-Babylons.pdf>, p. 81ff. Easter is a pagan holy day that was celebrated centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Easter is the English name for the Assyrian Queen of Heaven (Ishtar), who allegedly raised her dead son (also called ‘the Christ’) to life on Ishtar Sunday. Slapping the name of Jesus over Easter does not make it Christian nor the day of Jesus’ resurrection, which is calculated from the Sunday in Passover Week; not Rome’s Easter.

<sup>10</sup> Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (see note 1 for URL), p. 94, also note 400: Jerome came across Nazarenes in “Beroes, a city of Syria” (*De Viris ill.* 3, *NPNF* 2nd, III, p. 362). See Acts 24:5 (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119, note 401: M. Simon (p. 90, note 388)...J. Danielou...also views the Nazarenes as the descendants of the ...*(first) Christians* (i.e. the Jewish Apostles)...who “regarded the Jewish observance...of Sabbath...as still of obligation.” From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel\\_Simon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Simon): Marcel Simon (1907-1986) “was a French specialist in the history of religions, particularly relations between Christianity and Judaism in antiquity. His major work, *Verus Israel*, was published in 1948. It has been described as ‘seminal.’”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91. Eusebius, *HE* 4, 5, 2-11; Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 70, 10, *PG* 42, 355-356.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Eusebius, *HE* 3, 27, 3, trans. by Kirsopp Lake, Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 1949, I, p. 263.

<sup>15</sup> Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (see note 1 for URL), p. 94. Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 29, 7, *PG* 41, 402.

<sup>16</sup> See Law 102 at <http://seedofabraham.net/Law-102.pdf>, Mt. 5:17-19; Mark 2:27-28; Acts 21:20, 24; 25:8; Rom. 3:20, 31; 7:7, 12, 14; 1st Cor. 5:6-8; 1st Jn. 2:6; Rev. 14:12. Revised on Thursday, March 14, 2024